

Natural Resource News in South Carolina

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USDA OPENS 2005 CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM SIGN-UP

South Carolina farmers in selected watersheds among those eligible

COLUMBIA, SC, March 18, 2005—South Carolina farmers in parts of the Black River, Lynches River, and South Edisto River watersheds are among those invited to participate in the first national sign up of the Conservation Security Program (CSP). USDA also announced that producers in the 2004 CSP pilot sign-up program will also be included in this enrollment opportunity (SC's Saluda River Watershed). The sign up will be available from March 28 to May 27.

"CSP is a whole new direction in the history of USDA conservation programs," said Walter W. Douglas, South Carolina NRCS state conservationist. "While conservation incentive programs and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers date back to the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s, CSP represents the first time agricultural producers are offered payments not just to fix a problem, but in recognition of their ongoing stewardship and to maintain and further enhance that conservation commitment."

The 2005 South Carolina CSP watersheds include parts of 16 counties including: Edgefield, Aiken, Saluda, Barnwell, Bamberg, Orangeburg, Lancaster, Chesterfield, Kershaw, Darlington, Lee, Sumter, Florence, Clarendon, Williamsburg, and Georgetown. Total acreage included in the designated watershed areas is over 2.7 million.

Nationally, CSP is being made available on private agricultural land in 220 watersheds, covering about 185 million acres, in every state and the Caribbean. The national \$202 million budget will allow NRCS to offer an estimated 12,000 to 14,000 contracts to eligible farmers and ranchers.

To prepare agricultural producers for this historical new program, Douglas says South Carolina has been holding workshops across eligible watershed areas. "We hope most of the eligible producers interested in CSP have had a chance to attend a workshop and get a first hand explanation of the new goals and requirements associated with the program."

CSP offers three levels or tiers of participation, depending on the amount of the farm enrolled and the current level of documented conservation. Payments will be made based on this tier level as well as the producer's agreement to do additional practices to further enhance the environment. Tier I contracts (covering part of a farming operation) run for five years while Tier II and III contracts (covering all of a farming operation) can extend for 10 years.

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“All successful applications begin with demonstrated protection of soil and water quality,” says Douglas. “This would typically mean managing a farm or ranch using a mix of practices such as conservation tillage, pest and nutrient management, crop rotation, cover crops and buffers.” However, Douglas says that most CSP participants will go beyond the minimum and work to further enhance soil and water, improve wildlife habitat, or conserve or produce on-farm energy.

To apply, producers should first do a self-assessment of their farming operation. These are available at workshops or can be obtained in hard copy or CD version from USDA Service Centers in watershed areas. Additionally, the self-assessment and other program information may be accessed at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp>. Once applicants have filled in required information based on their records from the past two years, they may call their local office for an appointment. NRCS conservationists will then help them complete their resource inventory, determine their level of participation and determine possible payments.

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